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MIRABEAU, A VICTIM OF THE LETTRES DE CACHET

THE *lettres de cachet*, one of the most typical institutions of old French society, have been aptly called "the very essence of public life" before the Revolution. Upon them rested the authority of the king and the honor of the family; for the king had no other means of enforcing his will throughout the realm and the family relied upon these arbitrary orders to protect itself against degenerate members. Although it is commonly believed that the employment of *lettres de cachet* was largely confined to affairs of state, yet this is far from the truth. The evidence shows conclusively that out of a thousand cases hardly four or five were of this nature, while the remaining nine hundred and ninety-five or six dealt with matters of police or of family. In all of these latter cases the initiative was taken by the family, the government simply responding to the demands made upon it, demands multitudinous in number, varied in character and not confined to any rank or class.

So necessary did these orders appear to the old society that most of the cahiers of 1789 that had anything to say about them requested their retention in a modified form. So all-pervading was their influence in the life of the ancient régime, that the families wholly untouched by it were but few in number. Outside of Paris more *lettres de cachet* were called into existence by family troubles than by any other cause. In truth, the conservation of family honor may be said to have been the *raison d'être* of these arbitrary orders. For the social state of ancient France rested on the family organization; the family was everything, the individual almost nothing. From this close community of interests, it naturally followed that the dishonor of one member became the dishonor of all. To see that the reputation of the family suffered no harm was the duty of the father, and he exercised an authority hardly surpassed by the Roman of old. The true image of God upon earth, he possessed a power that was practically absolute. For he was the judge of his children, and not simply a crime, but even the fear of a crime, was sufficient to justify the demand for a *lettre de cachet*. Seldom, if ever, were these demands refused.¹

Such a rôle did the *lettres de cachet* play in family affairs prior to the Revolution. All their uses and abuses seem summed up in the

¹ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Oct., 1892; "Les Lettres de Cachet."

experience of the famous orator of the National Assembly, the Comte de Mirabeau. His case is as notorious as it is typical. His father, the Marquis de Mirabeau, commonly known as "*L'ami des hommes*," exhausted the patience of long-suffering ministers by reiterated demands for arbitrary orders, while the son, dragged from prison to prison, denounced the *lettres de cachet* in a work read throughout Europe, and immortalized his last imprisonment by his famous *Lettres de Vincennes*. A careful study of the sufferings of Mirabeau while a victim of the *lettres de cachet* is not only indispensable to an understanding of the man's subsequent career, but offers also a definite knowledge of one of the most important and most characteristic institutions of the ancient régime. The material for such a study is fairly abundant. It is found among the documents of the Archives Nationales¹ and in the writings of Peuchet², Montigny,³ Loménie,⁴ Stern,⁵ and of Mirabeau himself.⁶ But it is especially through the one hundred and thirty odd manuscripts in the archives of the French capital that we are brought into direct contact with this tragedy of old France.

Passing over Mirabeau's first confinement at Rhé in 1768, I turn at once to that period of almost continuous surveillance or imprisonment, beginning with the year 1773 and ending with 1780. During this time he was the victim of many *lettres de cachet* and the inmate of four different prisons of state.

After an unusually eventful youth Mirabeau was married in the summer of 1772 to Mlle. de Marignane, a wealthy heiress of Provence, and took up his residence in the family castle on the Durance. Notwithstanding the affirmations of his latest biographers to the contrary,⁷ Mirabeau did not begin his dual existence under favorable financial conditions. Bachelor debts, wedding expenses and the needs of a year were all to be met from the paltry 9000 livres granted to himself and wife in the marriage contract.⁸ The marquis was aware of the situation of his son, but refused him all aid.⁹ Mirabeau inevitably fell deeper into debt,¹⁰ and this debt was unnecessarily increased by extravagance.¹¹ Costly presents to his wife,

¹ Arch. Nat., K. 164, Cartons des rois : Louis XVI.

² *Mémoires sur Mirabeau et son époque*, 4 vols., Paris, 1824.

³ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, 8 vols., Paris, 1834.

⁴ *Les Mirabeau*, 5 vols., Paris, 1879-1891.

⁵ *Das Leben Mirabeaus*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1889.

⁶ *Lettres originales de Mirabeau*, 8 vols. in 4, Paris, 1798.

⁷ Stern, I. 75; Loménie, III. 90.

⁸ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 13; *Lettres originales*, II. 130.

⁹ Stern, I. 77, note 2.

¹⁰ *Lettres originales*, II. 132.

¹¹ *Lettres originales*, II. 138; *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 46, note 2.

princely sums lavished on the decoration of her chamber and expensive improvements on the estate, forced him to resort again and again to the Jews, who supplied him with money at exorbitant rates of interest. Shortly after the birth of an heir, in the fall of 1773, Mirabeau's situation became desperate.¹ He made a frank statement of his position to his father-in-law and received the offer of a large sum of money, due at a later date, on condition that his father approve the transaction.² This the marquis refused to do and affairs soon reached a climax. Mirabeau had pawned his wife's jewels and even her trousseau, and in his despair was about to appeal to his father to save him from his creditors by placing him under the protection of a *lettre de cachet*.³ But the marquis had been led to anticipate his son's wish. Friends and foe alike had supplied him with evidence, reliable and otherwise, of Mirabeau's reckless career.⁴

The honor of the family was at stake, and no man valued it more highly than he. For Mirabeau to be arrested by his creditors would be an eternal disgrace. True, the calamity might have been averted by paying his debts, but for the marquis that was the last resort. He was something of a debt-maker himself, and his coffers were never too well supplied with current coin of the realm.⁵ It was no uncommon course that the marquis took to escape from the perplexing position in which he found himself. He wrote to the minister La Vrillière, asking for a *lettre de cachet* that would give him time to settle the debts of this "worthy son of his mother," and prevent him from ruining himself and his family.⁶ He "deserves to be abandoned to his fate," so runs the letter, "but must be saved for the sake of his family." The request was granted and the form was duly filled out and forwarded to Provence.⁷ There it was served upon Mirabeau, who declared in writing his submission and betook himself to the family castle of Mirabeau, there to remain until released by a new order of the king.⁸ An "imprisonment" of this kind was apparently a hardship to nobody but the creditors. Mirabeau certainly did not complain and the marquis was satisfied, for the family honor had been saved.

The young man's residence at the castle of Mirabeau came to an end in the following spring. Reports reached the marquis that his worthy scion was cutting wood upon the estate and selling furniture to raise money.⁹ It afterwards transpired that the reports were maliciously false,¹⁰ but the father believed the son capable of

¹ *Lettres originales*, II. 132.

² *Lettres originales*, II. 132-133.

³ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 3.

⁴ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 2.

⁵ Stern, I., Chap. II.

⁶ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 4.

⁷ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 7.

⁸ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 6.

⁹ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 17.

¹⁰ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 18.

anything, and without pausing to investigate requested his transfer from the castle of Mirabeau to the neighboring city of Manosque.¹ The minister complied at once with the request, and a fresh *lettre de cachet* revoked the first and relegated Mirabeau to the place of confinement chosen by his father.² Again, as in the first case, I find a written statement by Mirabeau that he submitted to the order of the king.³ By the side of this document is another, written in uncouth characters and scarcely decipherable; it is the affidavit of the mayor and council of Manosque announcing the arrival of the young prisoner.⁴

However resigned Mirabeau might have been to such a mild-mannered despotism, he did not receive without a protest the blow that followed. To prevent the young man from incurring further debts and to secure a fund for the payment of the old debts, the Châtelet de Paris, at the request of the father and other relatives, declared Mirabeau under an interdict, and deprived him of the administration of all his property.⁵ Of the 9000 livres of income, 6000 were to be retained for the creditors, and Mirabeau was compelled to support his family on 3000 livres a year. Having protested in vain against the competence of the court he finally yielded, but only out of filial respect.⁶ He declared that he submitted everything, even his personal liberty, to his father, whom he recognized as his sole judge.⁷ These words in the mouth of a man of twenty-four, and the father of a family, reveal the gulf that separates the present family organization from that of a hundred years ago.

Mirabeau's life at Manosque was far from monotonous. He received the most positive proof of his wife's infidelity,⁸ but generously forgave her. Shortly after this episode, having learned that an engagement between her admirer and a Mlle. de Tourettes was likely to shatter, Mirabeau betook himself to the Château de Tourrettes and played successfully the rôle of a mediator. On his homeward way, he unwisely tarried at Grasse, the home of his sister, Madame de Cabris, a beautiful woman, but of somewhat questionable reputation. Here he accidentally fell in with a Monsieur de Villeneuve, a defamer of Madame de Cabris. Words led to blows, and Mirabeau chastised his opponent somewhat severely.⁹ Under the ancient régime, noblemen did not usually go to law with an affair of this kind, but Monsieur de Villeneuve laid the matter before the courts, charging Mirabeau with attempted assassination.¹⁰ The

¹ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 9.

² Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 10.

³ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 12.

⁴ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 13.

⁵ *Lettres originales*, II. 143.

⁶ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 22.

⁷ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 27.

⁸ Loménie, III. 720.

⁹ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 14.

¹⁰ Loménie, III. 135.

charge was, of course, ridiculous and it is generally agreed that the matter might have been easily settled, if the marquis had interfered.¹

To bring about this desired result, Mirabeau despatched his wife to act as an advocate with his father; she proved a treacherous pleader.² The marquis was angry with his son for having left Manosque without leave, and was further incensed by the scandal attendant upon the escapade at Grasse. He determined to anticipate the possible disgrace of an unfavorable decision of the court by procuring a new *lettre de cachet*.

The request was made three days after the arrival of the Comtesse de Mirabeau.³ In his capacity of first judge of his son, the marquis asked that Mirabeau be transferred to the Château d'If, off the southern coast of France. The ostensible causes of this imprisonment were disobedience to the king's order and the scandal at Grasse.

The 7th of September, 1774, a *lettre de cachet* was expedited to an officer in Provence instructing him to arrest Mirabeau and conduct him to the fortress of If, the expense of arrest and transfer to be paid by the family.⁴ In a letter of the same month, the marquis thanked the minister for the celerity with which the affair had been handled, asked that Mirabeau be prohibited from corresponding with anyone but his wife, and promised to send to the commandant at If a specimen of the countess's handwriting.⁵ The order had been executed without opposition.⁶ Mirabeau had been urged by his friends to fly and might have escaped, but he refused to do so, declaring that he had no desire "to withdraw himself from the authority of his father."⁷ The commandant had been prepared for the reception of the prisoner by a letter from the marquis warning him that his son was a "dangerous character."⁸ The *lettre de cachet* had done its work, and for two years nothing more is heard of the action begun against Mirabeau by Villeneuf.

The residence at If lasted seven months and the "victim of the *lettres de cachet*" was so successful in winning the good will of the commandant that the marquis received only the most flattering reports concerning his son, and was even urged to release him.⁹ But from unofficial sources the father had learned that the conduct of Mirabeau in the fortress had not been beyond reproach.¹⁰ Common

¹ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 35-36.

² Loménie, III. 139.

³ Stern, I. 83; Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 15.

⁴ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 18, 19, 21.

⁵ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 17.

⁶ *Lettres originales*, II. 167; Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 21.

⁷ *Lettres originales*, II. 167.

⁸ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 20.

⁹ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 44.

¹⁰ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 46.

report coupled his name with that of the wife of the sutler, and the sutler himself did not hesitate to charge Mirabeau with robbery.¹ Letters of the commandant and the later confession of the sutler prove conclusively that this charge was false,² but it was, as usual, true for the marquis. He decided to appeal to the minister to transfer his son to a more isolated fortress than that of If, as he wished to test him still further before giving him his liberty.³ The reasons given for the transfer were that "If was unhealthy and that disagreeable things happened there." If Mirabeau stood successfully the trial of his new imprisonment, his father intended to submit him to additional tests.⁴

There had been no new cause for a prolongation of Mirabeau's confinement, and it is not strange that his patience began to fail. The commandant, D'Allegre, a man of excellent reputation, had asked for the young man's release. This, in the eyes of the marquis, was sufficient proof that the guileless official had been "seduced, corrupted and deceived" by the crafty Mirabeau.⁵ In a *mémoire* written in Vincennes and addressed to his father, Mirabeau gives a most truthful characterization of the marquis's state of mind: "You consider," wrote the son, "that all who do not find me so bad as you think me, have been won over by me. He will seduce you: that is your formula, but are not these three words equivalent to saying, Take care; if you are not prejudiced, you will not find him so great a rascal as I make him out to be? I do not comprehend," Mirabeau went on, "how you can expect that I should be the only man in the whole world whose character is not a mixture of good and evil."⁶ Perhaps the attitude of the father toward the son, and the injustice of the system that had placed such absolute power in a father's hands, are best shown by a letter written two years later by the marquis to his brother. "I do not reproach myself," he wrote "on account of the transfer from Château d'If to the Château de Joux . . . had he remained at the Château d'If with the attestations of that idiot, D'Allegre, he would be there still crying out against injustice; he would not have destroyed himself as he has done, which is the salvation of his family."⁷

Even the *bailli*, who almost worshipped his brother, warned him that the public considered him "a little hard toward his own; that the son was guilty only of contracting debts . . . and that if all the young people in debt were shut up, one would see only gray beards on the streets."⁸ But all warnings were in vain; the gov-

¹ *Lettres originales*, II. 168.

² Peuchet, I. 127.

³ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 25.

⁴ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 49.

⁵ *Lettres originales*, II. 170.

⁶ *Lettres originales*, II. 170.

⁷ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 61.

⁸ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 53.

ernment machinery worked once more at the father's request and Mirabeau found himself banished among the snows and bears of Mount Jura. In the *mémoire* already mentioned, he describes his transfer: "I peaceably followed my conductor, who had no escort. I carried pistols; he had none. You know what account he gave of my conduct, and you see that I was resolved to try once more to touch you by my resignation."¹

Mirabeau's new place of confinement was the fortress of Joux, near Pontarlier, on the eastern frontier of France. He was allowed a large amount of liberty, passing his days in the city and his nights in the fortress. As time went on, he enjoyed still greater freedom, roving about the country on tours of investigation, even penetrating into Switzerland. A warm friendship had sprung up between him and the royal advocate at Pontarlier, M. Michaud, and they were often companions on the journeys referred to.

During his residence at Manosque, Mirabeau had written his *Essai sur le Despotisme*. It was now printed at Neufchâtel and many copies were smuggled into France. This act was a violation of the law, but although it was known both to the commandant of the fortress and to the king's advocate, they raised not a finger to punish the offender. But if the commandant, St. Mauris, tacitly allowed the violation of the censorship, there were other acts to which he did not shut his eyes so readily.

Mirabeau had continued his old practice of contracting debts. His course was not without excuse, for his income had been reduced to 100 livres a month, and this could not possibly meet all his legitimate expenses.² A note given by Mirabeau for 1500 livres fell into the hands of St. Mauris. It is true that the note was not due for several weeks and that Mirabeau had been promised 1500 livres for work that would soon be ready,³ but the note was dated Neufchâtel and in itself was a proof that St. Mauris had not watched his prisoner carefully. Furthermore, Mirabeau's relations with Madame de Monnier had created a scandal in Pontarlier, and, last of all, the government had sent instructions to search for the author of the *Essai sur le Despotisme*.⁴ The commandant believed that his confidence had been abused and determined to confine his prisoner more closely within the castle. A stormy scene occurred between the two, and shortly after Mirabeau disappeared.⁵

He was weary of prisons and unwilling to submit longer to the despotism of paternal government. In a letter to his uncle—his

¹ *Lettres originales*, II. 180.

³ *Lettres originales*, II. 193.

² *Lettres originales*, II. 192.

⁴ Loménie, III. 170.

⁵ *Lettres originales*, II. 101. Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 26.

father had declined to hear from him—he asserted that “liberty is a natural right” and asked “why should I be deprived of it?” He began to feel the spirit of the approaching revolution stirring within him, and declared that the times were changing and a man was permitted to be ambitious.¹ He had done well to take the matter into his own hands, for his father had no intention of putting an end to this long-drawn-out confinement. The marquis had taken no steps to settle Mirabeau’s debts, continued to write letters to St. Mauris warning him against his son² and, in a letter to the *bailli*, outlined his future policy:³ “As to his liberty,” he wrote, “if the king releases him, his creditors will hold him in a less commodious manner.” Mirabeau, if released, might go to Paris to aid his mother in a law suit against her husband and the marquis candidly acknowledged, “it is to my interest to keep him in prison, for fear that he will come here to second his mother.”⁴

Upon the evening of his evasion, Mirabeau had written to the minister of war, St. Germain, appealing to him for protection against his father. He appealed to him as a Frenchman and a subject of the king. Although he had suffered long, he had suffered patiently, for it was repugnant to him to struggle against his father, whose great reputation frightened him. He had, moreover, hoped for an improvement in his lot, but at the moment when he saw it cruelly aggravated, he withdrew himself from persecution.⁵

Paternal despotism had induced first the mental revolt uttered in the *Essai sur le Despotisme* and later the evasion itself and the appeal to justice. The escape of Mirabeau was announced by St. Mauris, January 21, 1776. His letter to the minister closed with the following pathetic request: “Do me the kindness, Monsieur, not to send me any more prisoners, for by my faith, I cannot accustom myself to being a jailor.”⁶ Until the latter part of February, Mirabeau remained in concealment at Pontarlier, some of the time in the house of the royal advocate himself, and succeeded in frustrating the efforts of St. Mauris to seize him.⁷ Meanwhile the Marquise de Mirabeau at Paris was storming the ministers with letters and *mémoires*, and playing in a somewhat exaggerated manner the rôle of the unfortunate mother.⁸

This revolt from parental authority came at a time when the government was most likely to entertain it. The administration of the *lettres de cachet* was in the hands of the noble Malesherbes, and efforts were being made to reform it. A commission had been es-

¹ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 55.

² Loménie, III. 163.

³ Loménie, III. 163.

⁴ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 59.

⁵ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 94.

⁶ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 26.

⁷ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 47.

⁸ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 28, 29, 30.

tablished for the examination of all cases, and it was upon its recommendation that action was taken. But the *mémoire* sent to Paris by Mirabeau was placed by Malesherbes in the hands of one of his colleagues, the Duc de Nivernois, an intimate friend of the marquis.

The duke returned the *mémoire* with the comment that it was "well and maliciously made." He joined to his reply a sketch of Mirabeau's career from the pen of the marquis, saying that "it could be counted upon." "He wished that he could say as much for the other."¹ It has been the practice of late years to follow the lead of the Duc de Nivernois and to discredit all evidence emanating from Mirabeau, but after carefully studying the records I am convinced that his statements are, on the whole, fully as reliable as those of his father. However well-meaning the Duc de Nivernois may have been, he was acting in the interest of friendship and not of justice.

His letter is one of the most significant documents connected with this most significant affair. Mirabeau, under arrest, confronted by no witnesses and unable to obtain a statement of the charges against him, was the victim of his father's reputation, and of his father's powerful friends. But he was not entirely abandoned. Michaud, the royal advocate at Pontarlier, attempted to reconcile father and son.² It was labor lost. The marquis declared that he washed his hands of his son, but he gave him the parting advice to leave the country, promising to send his pension when he knew where he was.³

Meanwhile the government had taken steps to secure Mirabeau, who had been obliged to leave Pontarlier and had gone to Dijon. There he was discovered and arrested.⁴ But the *grand prévôt*, Montherot, was so captivated by his prisoner that he allowed him to remain some time under surveillance in hired lodgings. Mirabeau wrote at once to his mother urging her to plead with the ministers for his release, and wrote himself to Malesherbes and St. Germain.⁵ Malesherbes examined the affair carefully, corresponding with the marquis, marquise, St. Mauris and Montherot, and declared, finally, that no action could be taken until the fugitive returned to the prison from which he had escaped.⁶

The idea of returning to Pontarlier was intolerable to Mirabeau, and he not only protested vigorously against it himself,⁷ but enlisted all the eloquence of Montherot.⁸ The forces against him were,

¹ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 31.

³ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 34.

² Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 34, 35.

⁴ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 36.

⁵ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 52, 36, 53, 54.

⁶ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 37, 43, 44, 45, 46, 50, 55, 60; Loménie, III. 240.

⁷ Loménie, III. 241; Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 72.

⁸ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 53, 55, 56, 58, 59, 63.

however, overwhelming, for his father had returned to the attack. At the time of Mirabeau's flight, the marquis evidently intended to leave him to his fate, but influenced by his brother and other relatives, he again changed his attitude and became once more the persecutor and prosecutor of the son.

The 6th of March, 1776, a *lettre de cachet* was sent to Montherot,¹ instructing him to transfer Mirabeau to the fortress of Joux. The *prévôt* did not execute the command, but remonstrated with Malesherbes,² and, finally, secured the withdrawal of the order, and the substitution of another confining Mirabeau in the Château of Dijon.³ Having added the commandant of this fortress to the list of his admirers, Mirabeau would have had little to complain of had his father regularly remitted his pension. Small as the sum was, it had not been paid for some time. But Mirabeau was weary of prisons and paternal rule, and demanded of the government why he should remain longer in confinement.⁴

In spite of his appeal, no reply was made. The government, however, had the matter under careful consideration. All the letters and *mémoires* from father and son were laid before the commission on the *lettres de cachet*, and one of the most interesting documents that I encountered in the Archives Nationales was their summing up of the case.⁵ Certainly the men upon whom the Marquis de Mirabeau could bring so much pressure to bear were likely to do him full justice, and yet I know of no more severe commentary upon his treatment of his son than this same report.

After stating carefully the evidence on both sides, the commissioners concluded that there were but two reasons why Mirabeau's imprisonment should be prolonged, namely, punishment for the evasion from Joux and time for settlement with his creditors. All the other charges were set aside, and it was added that an injustice would be done if the imprisonment exceeded six months. But the work of the commission came to naught. A change of ministers restored the old abuses and Mirabeau found himself once more at the mercy of his father. Entirely disregarding the decision of the commission, the marquis took steps to secure the indefinite confinement of his son. Mirabeau was to be placed at Doullens in Picardie under a commandant notorious for his severity. The correspondence that took place between the marquis and the commandant proves conclusively that the young man was to be treated as a dangerous criminal.⁶

¹ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 60. ⁴ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 97.

² Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 67. ⁵ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 96.

³ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 69. ⁶ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2 : 106, 107, 109, 110.

Mirabeau, his mother and his friends exerted all their influence to prevent the issue of an order transferring him to Doullens, but in vain. The 30th of April the letter was filled out.¹ The execution of it was delayed on account of Mirabeau's poor health,² but seeing the impossibility of winning his cause before the government, and unwilling to place himself again in the hands of his father, Mirabeau fled. For several weeks he wandered about, hiding from the police officers in the pay of the marquis, and in August, 1776, accompanied by Madame de Monnier, he made his escape to Holland. Once out of the country the pursuit was abandoned. So long as there was no pension to pay, and no danger that Mirabeau would assist his mother, it mattered little to the marquis what became of him.

Living under an assumed name, Mirabeau passed several months undisturbed by his father. During this time he had given offense to the marquis by anonymously attacking him in newspapers and in *mémoires*, written to aid his mother in her law suit, and when Mirabeau's hiding place became known his father was naturally desirous of placing him once more behind the prison bars. By uniting with the relatives of Madame de Monnier, who wished to secure possession of her, the marquis succeeded in lessening the expense of the undertaking, and in due time a police officer in the employ of the two parties was on his way to Holland.

All difficulties of extradition were overcome,³ the last *lettre de cachet*⁴ issued and Mirabeau soon found himself confined within a narrow, dimly lighted cell of the donjon of Vincennes. His room was high up in one of the towers, and through the narrow, deep, iron-barred windows nothing but a bit of sky was visible. With my mind full of his sufferings as he describes them in his letters, I realized, as I stood within that small, cold and dimly lighted room, the absolute misery and wretchedness, for a man like Mirabeau, of three years of confinement in a place like that.

But to grasp fully the pitilessness of the father, I would have you listen to the words with which he announced the imprisonment of his son. He was writing to his brother: "I received word yesterday that the rascal has been seized and is in irons . . . I would have liked, had it been possible, to have sent him to the Dutch colonies, for nobody returns from there . . . As to his imprisonment, my plan is definitely made. Nobody but myself and

¹ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 97, 98, 99, 104, 111.

² Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 111, 112, 116.

³ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 135.

⁴ Arch. Nat., K. 164, No. 2: 136.

the government shall know where he is, and, at my death, a sealed letter shall inform my successor of the locality.”¹ Surely the Roman father in the most unrestrained exercise of his power was hardly more inhuman than that.

It does not fall within the limits of this paper to follow Mirabeau through the years of his imprisonment. The *lettre de cachet* that placed him in Vincennes was practically the last from which he suffered, and closed the long series. As a fruit of his bitter experience he wrote within the walls of the donjon his work on *Lettres de Cachet et des Prisons d'État*, a companion piece to his *Essai sur le Despotisme*. From this prison, after more than three years of physical and mental torture, he went forth at last a bitter opponent of absolutism, to make war upon all arbitrary forms of government. And when, as the master spirit of the National Assembly, he appears tireless in his efforts to throw every safeguard around individual liberty and to place every possible check upon absolutism, there rises involuntarily before the mind's eye visions of If, Joux and Vincennes, and of his long years of suffering while a “victim of the *lettres de cachet*.”

FRED MORROW FLING.

¹ *Mémoires de Mirabeau*, II. 178, 181.